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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRISTINA 000591

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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: ASSEMBLY FINAL STATUS DEBATE ENDS WITHOUT
DELEGATES' ACTION, BUT ANXIETY VISIBLY INCREASING

Classified By: COM TINA KAIDANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Kosovo Assembly held a marathon July 31 session to hear an update on final status from Kosovo's Unity Team (UT) upon the latter's return from Washington. Speaking of the expected 120-day period of further talks between Belgrade and Pristina, President Sejdiu said the UT would participate, but asserted that the Team would not negotiate over Kosovo's independence or territorial integrity, nor agree to reopen the Ahtisaari final status package. Sejdiu's UT colleagues echoed this, but PM Ceku and opposition leader Surroi continued to distance themselves from the other members of the team by pushing for deadlines on status. Despite vitriolic attacks against the UT by Assembly delegates and general nervousness about what the new talks might bring, the Assembly reluctantly supported Sejdiu and his UT colleagues on the way ahead.

¶2. (C) Summary, cont. Most MPs indicated their continued strong faith and confidence in the U.S. (and EU, to a lesser extent) to see them through this process, which helped USOP in its active effort to quash a variety of resolutions and declarations contemplated by delegates attempting to define formal conditions that might tie the UT's hands in negotiations. At the session's conclusion, the Assembly merely reconfirmed informally its November 2005 declaration mandating the Unity Team to secure independence and sovereignty for Kosovo; delegates also asserted that the Assembly could be considered "in permanent session" and could therefore reconvene at any time to deal with status developments, and they authorized the UT to draft a united political platform on status. While this debate ended as well as can be expected, the level of anxiety over the status process and the desire to intervene -- unhelpfully -- among Assembly members is clearly on the increase. END SUMMARY.

UT Makes Case for Further Talks, But Still Not Unified

¶3. (SBU) Kosovo's Unity Team briefed the Kosovo Assembly on July 31 on final status developments. President Sejdiu led off the discussion, noting that the UT would participate in the expected 120-day period of further talks between Belgrade and Pristina and citing the support for this approach the

team had received from high-level USG officials. Sejdiu spoke of a seven-point plan on how the UT would conduct itself during these talks, including a firm assertion that Kosovo's independence and territorial integrity would not be compromised, nor would there be agreement to reopen the Ahtisaari final status package. Sejdiu also made clear that Kosovo's eventual declaration of independence will be done only in close coordination with the U.S. and EU.

¶4. (C) Sejdiu's other UT partners -- Prime Minister Agim Ceku, Speaker Kole Berisha and opposition leaders Hashim Thaci and Vetton Surroi -- generally supported this line as well. Thaci was particularly on message, pointing to the need for close consultation with the international community by saying the "free world did not leave us alone nine years ago and we will not leave the free world alone (in its strategy) now." However, Ceku and Surroi discussed setting deadlines for the status process (despite COM's early morning meeting with the PM prior to the session to urge that he refrain from promulgating this idea to the Assembly). In his concluding remarks, Ceku said he remained unconvinced that his idea to set a date for independence was wrong, and argued again that there should be a fixed timeframe after which independence would be declared and the international community invited to recognize. Surroi also referred to his well-publicized notion that independence must come by "Christmas" or the Kosovars should declare independence.

Reasons Understood, But UT Attacked

¶5. (SBU) MPs appeared to accept the UT's arguments, particularly when they were buttressed by references to U.S. support, but took the opportunity to vent their frustration

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at the Unity Team. Interventions from many MPs, not just those considered extremists, centered around the UT's "failure" to deliver independence and its obvious lack of unity, as well as allegations that the UT had ventured into competencies meant for the Assembly -- including decisions on elections timing, a new constitution, and state symbols. Some MPs made outright calls for the UT to be dismissed and the Assembly to take over its duties. Only a handful of MPs, out of the more than 40 who spoke, praised the UT's work. The extremists used the occasion to attack Serbia and recite a litany of "historical" wrongs that Serbia committed against Albanians in Kosovo and elsewhere. Other common themes in the interventions of MPs of all stripes were that Pristina would be asked to make more concessions during the new talks and open fear that the process would drag on endlessly after the 120 days.

Nervousness and a Desire to "Do Something"

¶6. (C) The same frustrations and nervousness over new talks were evident in polcouns' discussions with caucus leaders and influential MPs before the debate and in the Assembly lobby during breaks in the action. Many MPs were intent on introducing a resolution or declaration that would demonstrate the Assembly was an active partner in the process. It took some time to convince moderate AAK caucus leader Gjylnaz Sylaj, for example, not to go forward with a proposal to establish a parliamentary committee to draft a declaration of independence. The same was true for AAK Minister of Trade Bujar Dugolli, who initially wanted to introduce a resolution, the first point of which was to demand a deadline on independence. (Comment: The AAK party is in a particularly parlous state, with multiple factions -- some egging the Prime Minister on in his insistence on deadlines -- having emerged in the absence of AAK leader Ramush Haradinaj, currently on trial in The Hague for war crimes. The anxious and rushed feeling, however, extended to other parties as well. End Comment.)

Assembly Asserts Informal Recommendations

¶17. (C) In the end, after an exhaustive 10-hour debate, the Assembly concluded its activities, thankfully without passing a resolution or declaration, largely due to consistent USOP intervention. Informally, three recommendations were passed to the UT, read out by PDK caucus leader Jakup Krasniqi, regarding the new talks: the first reconfirmed the Assembly's declaration of November 2005 on the Kosovo people's desire for independence and sovereignty (meant to give the UT a platform upon its initial creation); the second established the Assembly "in permanent session" to deal with any matters arising from the status process; and the third authorized the UT "to draft a united political platform" on final status. (Note: "Permanent session," according to the Assembly's permanent secretary, is not within the body's regulations, so it is unclear what this means in practice. End Note.)

¶18. (C) COMMENT: While this debate ended as well as could be expected, it is clear that the level of anxiety and the desire for unhelpful activity with regard to the status process is increasing among Assembly members. This may well escalate even further during what promises to be a tense election season. The U.S. continues to have an outsized voice in urging restraint and patience -- indeed, the glue that held the Assembly together during the debate was the overwhelming trust and confidence of Kosovar leaders in the United States -- but that influence will wane as we approach the end of the 120-day engagement period, which now constitutes the new "deadline", at least in the mind of Kosovars, for resolution of the status issue. Given the tenor of this Assembly session, we can expect inordinate difficulty in holding delegates back from making an affirmative declaration of some sort as the new negotiations draw to a close. End comment.
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